

**‘MAKING A SONG AND DANCE ABOUT IT’:
(Self) Presentation in ‘The Ballad of John Spenser,
A Cheshire Gallant’.**

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I first became involved with the Cheshire Records of English Drama project in early 1992, when, as a still fairly new PhD, I was hired for two years as a Research Assistant to David Mills on a Leverhulme grant. At the end of the first year, I was promoted to Research Associate and told that I would be a co-editor of the volume. This is as much due to David’s generosity and sense of fair play as to my own hard work. I wish to express here my gratitude to David for all the help and support he has given me throughout the project, and for the trust and responsibility he gave me. Although the phrase has become somewhat hackneyed, it is nonetheless true that it has been a great privilege to work with him. And I would also like to express my appreciation to the entire Mills family — David, Joy, Ian, and John — for their many and frequent kindnesses to me over the years.

The Townships, Parishes and Other Localities section of the Records of Early English Drama volume for Cheshire, which is arranged alphabetically, begins with Acton. There are only two items for this location: one, from the diocesan Visitation Proceedings of 1611, cites John Spenser for ‘drumminge on Sabboath daies’.¹ This record was transcribed sometime in 1992 or 1993, when I was first involved with the *REED Cheshire* project as David Mills’ Leverhulme Research Assistant. The second item was only discovered when the volume was in the final stages of production, I think in late 2005 or early 2006. The University of Cape Town library was making a trial of the *Early English Books Online* database, and was inviting comments on the usefulness of the database prior to committing itself to a full subscription. As I am sure any REED editor will tell you, after the first dozen years on a volume you do get rather conditioned to thinking in REED terms. I ran a few keywords through the *Early English Books Online* search engine, and came up with a ballad on ‘Iohn Spenser a Chesshire Gallant, his life and repentance, who for killing of one Randall Gam was lately executed at *Burford* a mile from *Nantwich*’.² The text tells us that John Spenser³ was born at Acton, and that ‘For beating of the war-like Drumme/ no man could him surpasse’.⁴ The ballad dates from 1617, just